



CITY OF YELLOWKNIFE
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

September 14, 2020

Honourable R.J. Simpson
Minister Responsible for Education, Culture and Employment
P.O. Box 1320
Yellowknife, NT X1A 2L9

Dear Minister Simpson,

Re: Aurora College and Polytechnic University Governance

I am writing today to provide feedback on the Aurora College and Polytechnic University Governance discussion paper on behalf of the University/Post-Secondary Advisory Committee (UPAC). The purpose of the UPAC is to provide advice and guidance to the City of Yellowknife throughout the development of a response to the University Feasibility and Benefits Study and inform the City's efforts to establish the presence of a university/post-secondary institution in Yellowknife, as articulated in the Aurora College Foundational Review Report. The UPAC met in September to discuss the Aurora College and Polytechnic University Governance discussion paper and would like to submit the following feedback.

Indigenous representation

The Indigenous representation on the Board is extremely important. However, the residency requirement of these representatives is problematic. This does not recognize the reality that Indigenous peoples of the Northwest Territories (NWT) may be residing elsewhere and be looking to come back to the NWT to provide knowledge and support. Three Indigenous people is insufficient and we find disproportional to represent the large Indigenous student body and overall NWT population. We would suggest the inclusion of an Elder in this specific representation to provide valuable perspective and knowledge.

There is also a lack of information regarding how these representatives are appointed, for how long and terms for removal from the Board and there needs to be some language around regional representation of the Board.

The Bicameral system

The proposed 'bicameral' governance structure lacks clarity in roles and method of co-ordination between the Board of Governors and the Senate. Some explicit wording on how these two bodies relate and cross-fertilize is required. How do these groups work together? It appears to be a top-down Board-dictated relationship. In fact, these groups are inter-dependent but having a senior body (the Board of Governors) that maintains management and control negates the importance of the Senate and its programming responsibility. The Board appears to be able to supersede, if not completely contradict, autonomy of the Senate and appears to verge on 'over governing' rather than having the deft governing body of a small organization. Our preference would be to have a single body Senate that would build in all members of the board and individuals from outside the university to bring depth and dimension into the decisions being made.

Board Membership

We see a lack of coordination with partner organizations in the governance structure and would like the Board to have the flexibility to appoint ex-officio (non-voting) members. Other groups like the City of Yellowknife or education facilities/providers have a vested interest in the polytechnic and also can partner and assist in the successful deployment of programs and student supports in the community and should be given the opportunity to provide input and be involved in the discussions.

Further to board membership, we suggest the membership of the Board and Senate not be limited to residents of the NWT. The narrow view of local membership limits the success of the polytechnic as we see significant contributions can come from the Canadian population and international academic world. This diverse expertise can also make the polytechnic more marketable outside the North.

Expertise requirements

The expertise requirements are important, however, we see that there appears to be little emphasis on post-secondary organizational experience. Oversight and management (i.e. the Board) requires academic experience and as the expertise requirements stand in the document, any member of the government can fill these roles. There is a concern that these Board members, appointed by ECE, will be employees of the GNWT and therefore contradict the 'arms-length' spirit of governance. Specifying that the Board will comprise of non-territorial government (i.e. non-Government of the Northwest Territories) employees would ensure the Board is populated by community members and better represent the needs of residents and the polytechnic rather than what the government sees these needs to be.

Recommendation

We found the timeline for consultation and comments to be insufficient to support meaningful consultation and would appreciate a longer timeline to prepare comments on such an important and complex topic going forward. Many organizations are in the midst of re-starting or recovering from the disruptions of COVID and September is generally a busy time for academic stakeholders. We would have appreciated ECE's flexibility on the consultation timeline, which was requested but denied.

Should you have any questions regarding the UPAC and its position on this discussion paper, please do not hesitate to contact me at my office at 867-920-5693 or by email at mayor@yellowknife.ca or contact the Chair of the Committee, Councillor Julian Morse at 867-446-0276 or by email at jmorse@yellowknife.ca.

Sincerely,



Rebecca Alty
Mayor

DM#625020

